

Bolivia Guerrilla Drive Died With Guevara

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LA PAZ, Oct. 11—The death of Che Guevara—which seems confirmed to the degree that human capability permits—can also be read as the obituary of the seven-month-old Communist guerrilla campaign in Bolivia's southeastern jungles.

Last Sunday, when Bolivian soldiers gunned down a guerrilla chieftain later identified as Guevara, they did more than kill the most mysterious and mystical Latin American revolutionary of modern times.

They also delivered the coup de grace to an insurgent movement whose electrifying early successes had disintegrated in recent weeks into an unbroken string of reverses. Broken in combat and with guerrilla support groups decimated, the guerrillas had ceased over the past month to pose a significant threat to the status quo in this turbulent Andean country.

Scattered remnants of the 100-odd Bolivians, Cubans and others that originally launched the campaign are still at large and probably will be for some time. But their status now is that of fugitives wandering the vast void that is the Bolivian backlands.

The guerrillas' disarray at the end, at least for now, of Guevara's apparent scheme to transform Bolivia into the first in a series of "little Vietnams" scattered across Latin America.

Ever since the August meeting of Latin revolutionary groups in Havana, it has been apparent that one of the main aims of the Cuban-supported

Bolivian guerrilla movement was to suck the United States into a massive military involvement here.

But in fact, from the very outset of the guerrilla activity the United States has gone to great lengths to avoid close identification with the Bolivian armed forces' repression campaign. Although the United States is an avowed supporter of President Rene Barrientos Ortuño's military-backed government, U.S. policymakers have been aware of the implications of their rushing in troops and equipment.

This is not to say that Washington maintained a strict hands-off policy. There was a definite acceleration of certain military supplies previously earmarked for Bolivia. Some additional U.S. military personnel were brought in—notably a Special Forces counter-insurgency team whose job was to train a Bolivian ranger battalion in anti-guerrilla tactics.

However, all this personnel, including the Special Forces advisers, was carefully kept far removed from the area where the guerrillas were operating. During the entire period, U.S. military personnel in Bolivia has never totaled more than about 150.

As to the CIA, there probably is some justification to the suspicion that it played a discreet advisory role here. Most observers think, for example, that the impressive display of photographs and other evidence about Guevara's presence here, unveiled by Bolivia two weeks ago, could not have been put together without some highly professional outside help.

But whatever the degree of poor one that has a long history of involvement, the evidence indicates that its effect was marginal at best in turning back the guerrilla threat. Instead, what seems to have turned the tide was miscalculation by the guerrillas and an increase in the Bolivian army's competence to exploit these mistakes.

Originally, the country seemed an ideal choice for the testing of the Guevara thesis that communism can be brought to Latin America only through guerrilla warfare. The country is a desperately

By mid-August, however, events indicated that the guerrillas were suffering a severe erosion of their existing supplies and were unable to get replenishments from sympathizers in the cities. In addition, they made the mistake of expanding out of their original zone of operations, where they had been able to move about unhindered, into areas where their mobility was greatly lessened and their available escape routes greatly reduced in number.

At the same time, the Bolivian army was transferring more seasoned troops in and those already on the scene were learning the hard way. By the end of September, the guerrillas had suffered heavy losses and were known to be in a general state of rout. At this point, military sources, which had accumulated considerable evidence pointing to Guevara's leadership, revealed that the shadowy Cuban and admitted his identity but had been bottled up in a re-

A tense cat-and-mouse game followed, culminating Sunday in a bloody fight where four guerrillas were killed. The following day, the Bolivian high command announced officially that Guevara, brought to the end of his rope by asthma and rheumatism, was among them. Yesterday, Ovando told reporters that before dying of his wounds Guevara not only had admitted his identity but had conceded that his Bolivian campaign had failed.